



Printing in Mainz to 1480
will enable scholars to explore the beginnings of modern communication that was to transform European society. It provides an invaluable resource both for researchers interested in the development of printing itself, and scholars seeking insights into European religion, politics and society.

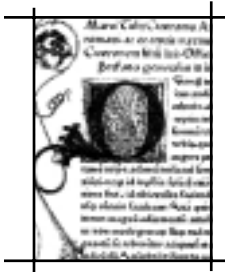
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INCUNABULA: THE PRINTING REVOLUTION IN EUROPE, 1455-1500

Unit 1: *Printing in Mainz to 1480*

Primary Source Microfilm
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Introduction and selection: Dr Lotte Hellinga (Former Deputy Keeper, the British Library)

European Printing

The invention of printing with movable type was one of the most significant innovations in European history. After years of experimentation with types cast from matrices, Johannes Gutenberg finally succeeded in setting up the first printing press to use the technology in Mainz in the early 1450s. Book production had been a slow and limited process, but by increasing the speed and scale of publication, printing brought the written word to a wider audience than ever before. This had radical effects on every aspect of Western culture, from education and religious thought to politics.

This unit brings together, for the first time, all the texts that survive from the very beginnings of printing in Europe. The most extensive collection of its kind, it contains more than 130 publications originating in Mainz between 1454 and 1480. Alongside Gutenberg's first publications, exemplified by his Latin Bible, it includes publications originating from the press run by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer; the Catholicon press; the press of "The Printer of the Darmstadt Prognostication"; and the press of the brothers Heinrich and Nicolaus Bechtermüntze based at nearby Eltville.

The texts reveal how printers' notions of the audience they intended to reach changed over time. Many early Mainz printers concentrated on producing expensively decorated texts that found a market among the richer monasteries. Later presses, however, began to produce more modest publications, many in German, suggesting that their works were aimed at a wider lay audience.

The full-text versions on microfiche enable scholars to explore early printing types, typographical layout and print techniques. Gathering together many copies of the same text reveals an interesting paradox. Although printing facilitated textual uniformity, printers deliberately introduced variations. For instance, two versions of Gutenberg's 42-line Bible are included, allowing the researcher to compare the widespread differences caused by resetting and correction. The unit also contains many texts beautifully finished by hand, including outstanding examples of illumination.

A thriving industry in this period, this decoration suggests that books were regarded as aesthetic objects. Moreover, it implies that this was still a highly visual culture where images were considered to be as crucial a medium as words for conveying information.

Exploring which works were deemed sufficiently important or popular to print provides rich insights into the concerns of later 15th-century society. Print was immediately put to many uses, resulting in a tremendous variety of material. There was a great demand for religious publications. In addition to Bibles, the unit contains many broadsheet indulgences, including several copies of the very first to be printed, issued in 1454-55 in response to the threat of Turkish advances into Europe. Also included are elementary schoolbooks, and many copies of political broadsides relating to the "Mainz Feud" of 1462-65. These broadsides, representing the earliest known use of the press for political purposes, demonstrate that from the outset printers were aware of the power of the press to influence public opinion.

Highlights of *Printing in Mainz to 1480*

The collection has drawn upon 24 libraries, including the world's largest collections of incunabula in the British Library, London, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Among the texts are:

- Gutenberg's "Sibyllenbuch" and "Türkenkalender"
- Both versions of the 1457 Psalter
- The Duranti of 1459 and its proof sheets
- Illuminated copies, including the 1462 Bible and the Gratianus
- The "Catholicon" of 1460
- Almanacs and indulgences
- Copies of Cicero's "De officiis", the first classical text to reach print
- Copies of Aelius Donatus's "De octo partibus orationis," an elementary Latin grammar for schoolchildren
- Secular broadsides

Unit 1: 327 fiche, 133 titles

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